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SPIRITUAL PREREQUISITES

BY DONALD FRASER



SPIRITUAL PREREQUISITES FOR THE PERSUASIVE PRESENTATION OF CHRIST

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Spiritual Prerequisites for the Persuasive Presentation of Christ

I wish I knew how to impress upon you the one thought that is in my mind, the one spiritual prerequisite for the persuasive presentation of Jesus Christ in the foreign field. I remember the words of Jesus Christ, when He said: "He that sent me is with me; the Father hath not left me alone." In these words one sees the key to Christ's consistency and truthfulness. In the time of popularity and in the time of unpopularity, He recognized that God was with Him; and so I want to say that the one spiritual prerequisite is that we men and women who mean to serve God, either here or abroad, should live in a constant, holy fellowship with God Himself.

God never sent a man alone to do His work. To shrinking Moses He said, "I will be with thy mouth." To Joshua He said, "As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee." To sensitive Jeremiah He says, "Be not afraid . . . for I am with thee." To Paul, in the midst of licentious Corinth, He said, "Be not afraid, but speak, for I am with thee." And when He sent forth His disciples on the world-wide commission, He coupled with His commission the promise of His presence through all the ages. And when we read in the Acts of the signs and wonders and miracles which those first disciples did, we find the secret of it all in one phrase, "the Lord working with them."

We have been hearing a good deal about the prospects of the evangelization of the world in this generation, and certain arithmetical calculations have been offered to us. I feel most suspicious of all those calculations, for it is not by a multitude of men that the world is going to be won for Christ. As well think that by the sending forth of 100,000 phonographs into the foreign field the world will be brought to Christ. What we want is only one type of men and women—men of wisdom, who have learned to keep company with God and are going forth as His servants, in His fellowship. This is the only type of man who is going to help much in the evangelization of the world in this generation. The supreme lesson of the lives of such men as Brainerd, of Moody, of Hudson Taylor, and others, is just the unmeasured possibilities for evangelization that lie in a single life wholly yielded to God. I know that we have come in these days to a time of great self-sufficiency, and we think that our organization is now so perfected that we can by means of executive ability and high training become efficient messengers of God. But I am quite sure of this: that when a man is projected out into the foreign field, and lives alone, the supreme test of his usefulness in the years that come will be whether he has learned that he is identified with God, that his work is God's work, and God works with him. Remember Luther's bold word in the day of crisis, "Lord, Thou art imperiled with us." It is the absolute certainty that God has sent us and has not left us alone, that will keep us hopeful and optimistic in the day when riot and insurrection threaten to swamp the Church of God, or when backsliding and sin mar and spoil that Church which He is calling out to Himself.

I think of an incident that happened, a word that was spoken in 1905 during our Church crisis in Scotland, when the House of Lords made a certain decision which suddenly deprived our Church of all its property, and seemed to blot out a bright future of usefulness in the world. When the decision had been given and Dr. Rainy, the spiritual father and great ecclesiastic in Scotland, was leaving the House of Lords, along with the leading counsel, the leading counsel came up to him in a moment of supreme depression, and he said, "If at the first hearing Lord Shand"—one of the judges—"had not died, that decision would have been reversed, would have gone in our favor." Dr. Rainy's only reply was, "His death seems like a Providence." That was the answer of a man who believed that his cause was identified with the cause of God, that he was working with God, and that though God may defeat our methods, God still must triumph.

Let me press this truth on you for two or three reasons. First of all, this continual fellowship is necessary, if a man is going to fulfil the special service of the missionary. There is only one aim before us missionaries; it is the presentation of Jesus Christ to the world. I do not for a moment fancy that such an aim in any way limits the methods which we may use. Everything which elevates the social conscience, which purifies administration, which sanctifies laws—every method of that sort may become an avenue to lead to Jesus Christ. But this I say, that these things by themselves are useless; that unless those avenues lead directly to the living Christ, we are only doing a temporary work which will not last through the ages. I say, too, that if we who lead along those avenues are not to end in a maze, we must step side by side with

Jesus Christ, that the people may at last reach to Him. Let me press it. The supreme end of the missionary cannot be attained by anything else than by spiritual methods, by spiritual ambitions, the elevation of the human race until it returns to God and the face of God is again formed in man.

I know that missionaries are busy men. I fancy there are few lives lived in this earth so continually and sustainedly strenuous, but haste, activity, will not attain our ends, for these ends are far more spiritual; they will not attain to Christ. There is so much to do in the foreign field and so little time in which to do it, that a man is apt to be carried away in a torrential rush, that he is apt to forget the first things and the first power. Artisan missionaries work like galley-slaves; the doctor moves among crowds of patients; the clergyman is busy from morning to night in administrative, or in pastoral and evangelistic work, and at the end of the day the impression is, "How busy we are!" when it ought to have been, "How near God is!"

We know that in this world there are many things that can be attained by activity, by haste. The engineer may overcome many a natural difficulty by sheer genius and by work. The financier may overstep many a hindrance by methods good or evil and add to his capital by continuous work. But Jesus Christ cannot be presented to the world except by spiritual methods and by living in the fellowship and company of Christ. Therefore, one of the first lessons a man must learn in the foreign field is that he must have the grace to limit himself, to limit his activities, to refuse to run on sidings, and to take time to cultivate the friendship of Christ. One hour's work from a man who lives with God is worth ten

hours' work from a man who lives alone. It may mean a less quantity of work, but it must mean an immense addition to the energy of the service we are rendering. My brothers, if we neglect this, we shall teach false lessons to the heathen. We shall be teaching worry when we ought to be teaching peace, irritability when we ought to be teaching forbearance, passion when we ought to be teaching love; and our whole life will be a travesty of the life of Jesus Christ. No; when one looks at the world and the forces we have got to meet, one cannot help being certain of this, that there is no other power in the world which can overcome but the power of the presence of God with us; for we fight not against the powers of this world, but against the rulers of darkness, against all the constant evil passions of man, and there is nothing else that will overcome.

When Hudson Taylor embarked on his great enterprise for the evangelization of inland China, God seemed to say to him, "I am going to evangelize inland China, and I will do it through you if you walk with me." I remember Dr. Laws, our father in Central Africa, telling me that in the days of their quixotic enterprise, when they pushed up into the interior with the Gospel and men thought they had gone on a mission of death and failure, that there were only two words in his mind through the whole of his canoe journeys, "God lives, and my father is praying." He recognized that the triumph that was coming was not coming to him through the wisdom of their arrangements, but because God was joined in a holy partnership with them for the evangelization of inner Africa.

I see that it is true, as one reads the story of the missionaries who lived through days of failure, as well as in the story of those

who lived in the days of triumph, that the only thing that kept them true to Christ who commissioned them was the fact that God lived with them and God worked with them. Has it not been impressed on the world during these last few months that there is no true triumph of God wrought except where God is the predominant partner and the only one visible? Is not this the whole story of the Welsh revival, how the leader was often invisible, often refused to speak, often refused to appear at the meetings, and the work went on spontaneously, for there was no other arm visible but the arm of God. Read the story of David Brainerd here in America among the North American Indians, and you will see in his reports to his commissioners a paragraph that runs something like this: "I never saw the work of God appear so independent of means. I seemed to stand still and do nothing; God seemed to work alone." My brothers, if we are going to impress Jesus Christ on the world, we must learn this lesson of being willing to be forgotten, of being willing to be despised, if only Jesus Christ is made visible and allowed room to work.

I pass on to another point. This recognized friendship of Jesus Christ is very necessary, if a man is going to retain spiritual sensitiveness and so persuasively present Jesus Christ to the world. Let us not deceive ourselves. The foreign mission field is no hot-bed for saints. Rather it is a place of dreadful spiritual tragedy. There men live away from all the holy influences of Christian society; they live among others where the social conscience is pitched on a lower key than anything we know of here at home. They hear things daily that they ought not to hear, see things they ought not to see, and the tendency is always for what is fine in us

to grow coarse, to sympathize with clay. I am sure of this, that there is no other deliverance for us, no other means of retaining holy, spiritual sensitiveness, responsiveness to God, than that we should live with Him. Let a man once lose spiritual visions, cease to hear the holy sound of God speaking, and his efficiency is weakened, if not entirely destroyed. Think of Henry Martyn, a man who was eminently efficient in the presentation of Jesus Christ. He made as the motto of his life : " I am born for God only. I wish to have my whole being swallowed up in the will of God." The result of this continual spirit of devotion of Martyn was that, although living among all the degradation of Mohammedanism and of heathendom, he never lost his sensitiveness, his horror of sin, and his intense appreciation of Jesus Christ. One time, when a Mohammedan was speaking derisively of Christ to him, he said to this Mohammedan : " I could not endure existence if Christ were not glorified. It would be hell to me, if He were always to be thus dishonored." And when the Mohammedan, in surprise, asked him how this could be—why he should feel so—he said : " If you pluck out my eyes, I cannot tell you why I feel pain ; it is just feeling ; and it is because I am one with Christ that I am thus so dreadfully wounded." It is a fact that the man who is going to present the true Christ to others must have something of this painful fellowship with Christ, bearing daily something of the stigmata of Christ, wounded with the sins of the world, never losing a sense of the eternal horror of sin and the continual attraction of Jesus Christ.

I do not believe that there is any other type of man who can truly reflect Christ to the world. You go into the foreign field as

Christ's emissaries. Men look on you that they may discern the face of God, and it is that type of life that you are going to live daily which will interpret God to the people you are living among. I wonder what kind of lesson we are going to teach to the world that we are going to live in. What kind of reflection of Jesus Christ are we going to give? I see in one of the wise instructions of the Church Missionary Society to its missionaries a paragraph that reads like this: "The conscientious industry of Christian missionaries is not denied, but assertions are made in various quarters that the high spiritual tone, the strong devotion which makes self-sacrifice easy, and which manifests to all around that the missionary is absorbed by love to his Lord and to his work for the Lord's sake—that these are not always so evident as might have been looked for." I think it so true of most of us. We are strenuous, yes; we are busied night and day. Strenuous in what? Is it in the multitude of our organizations, or in our passion to be absorbed in God? We have left our mark on the land. What mark? The mark, perhaps, of industry, of a multitude of schools, of perpetual itineration; or is it the mark of the intensity of the glory of God that is shining through us? Here, surely, is our first work—first in point of importance, of pre-eminence—that God shall be sought day by day, His company cultivated until there is one atmosphere going forth, surrounding us, and that is the atmosphere which tells of God.

And last, the company of God is necessary if we are going to have that character which most efficiently commends Jesus Christ to the world. Holiness is not found anywhere else. Activity does not produce it; it comes straight from the life of God.

If I am going to be holy, I must let God come to me, I must depend on God, on His company, and on nothing else. You little know how much your character is built up by the society in which you live. You do things because your society approves of it ; you refrain from other things because these things are disapproved ; but when you go out into the foreign field, false props are removed ; you are alone, alone amidst daily temptations, with no one to depend on but your companion, God. Then your true character appears. The platform lights are turned down ; you stand in the clear searching daylight. Past reputation is nothing ; public appearances are nothing ; the man you are will be known by your colleagues, by the natives around you. If passion, or greed, or selfishness stain your character, you will immensely limit your usefulness and power of presenting Christ. There is no finer offering that we can give to the world than that we should give character stamped with the image of God, that we should be as men in whom God lives, and in whom God is forming Himself. "Holiness is a flower not of this world's growth, and when men see it they recognize that another world has made it ;" and if, day by day, you try to live so disciplined, so much in the communion of God Himself, there must come to you something of the image of Jesus Christ, which will be your best and daily testimony to the power of Christ in the world.

In Scotland we have the memory of M'Cheyne, whose life has been the inspiration of thousands. Dr. Andrew Bonar's wife was led to Christ through him, and she always said : "It was not his matter nor his manner that struck me ; it was just the living epistle of Christ, a picture so lovely that I would have given the whole world to be such as he is." A minister in the north met M'Cheyne

and was in his company for a little while, and he said he never met a more Jesus-like man in the world, and he went into his room to weep and to give himself to God. God help us, is there anything of this atmosphere in our lives, that the men and women who live with us daily in college, that the heathen around about us in the foreign field, are compelled to recognize that Jesus Christ is in us, to see the very image of God reflected in our daily conduct and work. The artisan, or teacher, or doctor, or minister, who so lives that God lives through him, will be the man who will best commend Christ, whose service will be constant, moment by moment, day by day. We speak much of power for service. There is a greater gift, power to be holy and to be Christlike. He surely is least in the Kingdom of God who, while he may win multitudes of souls, forgets to discipline his own character, to get it sweetened in the atmosphere of Jesus Christ. He surely is the most efficient and Godlike servant who, day by day, seeks to live beside God until God is formed in him.

Let me press it on you. My brothers, seek the company of God, not for efficiency in your service, but for His own sake. Do not let your individual need be buried in your profession. You need God and Christ for your own sake first, before you need Him for efficiency in your profession. Seek Him for what He is, and seek Him for what you are and what you need, and then you will have efficiency. Goodwin, one of our old theologians, says: "I have known men who sought God for nothing else than just to seek Him, to come to Him, they so loved Him; they scorned to soil Him or themselves by any other errand, but just came to Him that they might be alone in His presence." Of such surely was Thomas

Bradwardine, an old archbishop of Canterbury, who prayed thus: "Thyself, my God, I love; Thyself for Thyself above all things, for Thyself I love. Thyself I desire as a final end. Thyself for Thyself, not for aught else, I always and in all things seek with my heart and whole strength, with groaning and weeping, with continual labor and grieving. If Thou dost not bestow on me Thyself, Thou bestowest on me nothing. If I find not Thyself, I find nothing." Let us seek this passionate devotion to Christ Himself for His own sake. It is the man who, like Zinzendorf, cries, "I have one passion, and that is He, He only;" it is that type of man who will daily present Christ. On the drugs that he prepares in his dispensary, in his class-room—on all his work, there will be one stamp, "Holiness unto the Lord;" and the one testimony of his life, moment by moment, and day by day, will be Jesus Christ and the supreme, ineffable excellence of Christ, whom he is presenting to the world.

Copies of this pamphlet may be ordered from the Student Volunteer Movement, 25 Madison Avenue, New York, at 5c. each, 40c. per dozen, \$2.50 per hundred, express charges prepaid.

Other addresses delivered at the Fifth International convention of the Student Volunteer Movement may be found in the Report which was published under the title, "Students and the Modern Missionary Crusade."

